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Latin America

REGIONAL A N D POLITICAL ANALYSIS

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~~SECRET~~Chile: The Church Speaks Out

The Catholic Church has issued its toughest criticism yet of the junta, condemning not only the recent ban on all remaining political parties, but also attacking a variety of government policies and attitudes.

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The blast was leveled in a lengthy newspaper announcement sponsored by the Permanent Committee Of the Council of Bishops. The bishops examined such areas as missing persons, the role of political parties, freedom of expression, and the general economic situation. On all issues the clergymen minced no words in expressing their dissatisfaction with the way the Pinochet government has proceeded. The churchmen saved their strongest language for the section on the constitution and the law. The clerics believe "there will not be full guarantees of respect for human rights as long as the country has no constitution, old or new, and ratified by popular suffrage; while laws are not made by legitimate representatives of the citizenry; and while all government organs, from the highest to the lowest, are not subject to the constitution and the law."

the bishops' ironic, at times almost sarcastic tone, has produced a blatantly political document designed to exert the greatest possible pressure on the junta.

The church statement has drawn a harsh response from Julio Duran, president of the national bar association. Duran has labeled the church a "political party," which violates the ban on partisan activity, and as seeking to control public opinion. The government itself has yet to respond.

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